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ABSTRACT

The children's books which have been awarded the Caldecott medal for each year's finest illustrations in juvenile literature exemplify the best in book making and in color reproduction and are among the best examples of art available to children. However, a recent study of the content of these books shows that both the text and the illustrations portray female characters as subordinate to the other sex, as the one who fails, as the caretaker of the home, as the nurturer of the family, and as the character seen most often in the home environment and least often in business and the professions. Thus, an assumption that the Caldecott-award-winning books are not stereotyping the female image can be challenged. (JM)

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SUGAR AND SPICE AND ALMOST ALWAYS NICE:
A Content Analysis of the Caldecotts

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Each April Hollywood sprinkles stardust around the nation when the annual Academy Awards tap excellence within its ranks and presents the "Oscars" to its elite and most talented. This ritual is followed by the "Grammy", recognizing the very best in recorded music and the "Emmy" for outstanding achievement in television. America and indeed, the world heed these awards. They, like most awards of national magnitude, are coveted.

In the literary world, coveted awards are eagerly sought by authors, illustrators and publishing houses as well. A major award will guarantee boosted sales, prestige and increased royalties. Anytime a book is singled out as "outstanding" by a reliable body of literary jurists; authors, illustrators and publishing houses have reason to rejoice.

The children's book field is crowded with honors. Books for children receive recognition for many reasons and the field is richer because of them. The most prestigious, perhaps, of these awards are those that are presented by the American Library Association. Children's librarians gather together each year and decide which of the many thousands of new books for children

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*Dr. Chambers served as Dr. Roberts' advisor for this two-year investigation, and doctoral dissertation.

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will be singled out as "the best" of the year. The awards, in the form of a medal, are given for two reasons: 1) literary quality and 2) for excellence of illustrations. The first mentioned award is the Newbery Award. It is presented to what this committee feels is the finest writing, by an American author, of the past year. The winner of this award is almost guaranteed to be an instant classic. The second award, presented by this group, is the Caldecott Award. It is presented to the artist who produced the finest illustrations of the year in a children's book. Most often these books are classified as picture story books, meant to be enjoyed by youngsters from about age two to approximately eight. The Caldecott winner, as its fellow Newbery winner, basks in the literary spotlight and usually enjoys great success in the field.

Without question these awards do recognize excellence. The Caldecott winners exemplify the finest in bookmaking, color reproduction, and are probably the best examples of real art available to, and meant for, children. They are, by and large, delightful! These award winning books are widely read, strongly recommended by children's librarians and often find their way into nursery schools and the primary grades of the public schools. Everyone loves them. They are beautiful. They, by the nature of the award, enjoy a greatness that they most often deserve.

These honored books for children, which exemplify the very best in the art of illustration, may, however, offer more than the touted aesthetics presented to children. What social message do they offer? What value structures do they represent? What, beside art, do these books contain?

Psychologists have indicated for years that the ages (2-8) these books are geared toward, are important ones. One of the important learnings during this time is to identify with sex role behavior. Recent movements by

responsible groups have questioned the stereotyping of sex role behavior—particulary the female sex role behavior—in the media. Any thinking person would have to include children's books as a part of that media. Certainly the most distinguished of these books need scholarly evaluation to see what, in fact, these books might offer young females concerning their role in the greater society.

A recent study, The Female Image in the Caldecott Award Winning Books, by Dr. Patricia Roberts as her doctoral dissertation at the University of The Pacific has asked that question and has received some surprising answers.

In order to analyze the sex role behaviors of the female image in these books, the content analysis for the study was implemented in four (4) steps. First, the establishment of the content validity for the definitions used in the hypotheses relating to the female sex role behaviors was conducted by a jury of sociologists from the University of The Pacific, Stockton, California, Delta College, Stockton, California and California State University, Fresno, California.* Second, a content analysis instrument, Content Analysis Form For The Female Image (CAFFI) was developed for judging sex role behaviors of the female characters. Next, an inter-rater reliability factor of .93 for the instrument was established. Last, the instrument was applied to determine a text and illustration analysis of the female image in every Caldecott winner from 1938-1974.

The analysis of the text and illustrations of these books revealed that the human, animal and inanimate female characters were shown as subordinate to the other sex, as the one who fails, as the caretaker of the home, as the nurturer of the family and as the character seen most often in the home environment, and seldom seen least number of times in business and the professions.

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The Female Image as subordinate to the other sex. The female image was judged to be subordinate to the male image in the illustrations as well as in the text of these books when one examines them for this content. There were numerous female characters who were placed in a lower or inferior position, and who fell under the authority of others or who lacked authority themselves. For example, when the leading female character, Katy, in The Egg Tree (Scribner's 1950) is considered, one sees Katy in an inferior position when compared with her brother, Carl. Katy and Carl are on an Easter Egg hunt at Grandmom's farm. Carl finds eggs. Katy can't find any. Katy feels stupid. Finally, Katy ventures up to the attic, finds several old decorated eggs and brings them to the kitchen to show the others. Grandmom says everyone may choose one of the eggs Katy found to keep for their own. The eggs are Katy's treasure—her special find—yet the text tells us that Carl chooses first. Another example is Mei Li. She walks behind her older brother and gives her firecrackers to him to shoot. He jeers at her "...Only boys can be real actors." Her uncle laughs at her saying "You are brave...for a girl." (Mei Li, Doubleday, 1938). In Funny Little Woman, (Dutton, 1972) the rice dumpling maker hides behind a statue trying to escape from a horned, fanged male creature who grabs her with a clawed hand. She then clings to a rock but the male creature pulls her into a rowboat and rows her across a river to a strange house. These examples are repeated in others of these books.

The Female Image As The One Who Fails. There were various female characters who showed a deficiency or lack in attaining a desired goal or who showed an omission in performance when these books were analyzed. For example, the unfortunate rice dumpling maker fails to keep from laughing which causes the wicked oni to discover her hiding place. (Funny Little

Woman, Dutton, 1972). In A Story-A Story, frustrated Moatia, The Fairy-Whom-Men-Never-See fails to escape from the trap of the spider man. (Atheneum, 1970). There is young, unhappy Ceci in Nine Days to Christmas, (Viking, 1959) who stands behind a tree and cries, "Don't let them hit it. Don't let them break my pinata." The text tells us that Ceci can't move or look when the pinata is finally broken. Lonely, Baboushka, in Baboushka and The Three Kings, (Parnassus, 1960), hunts for a path, searches from village to village, never stops and never finds what she seeks. Cinderella in The Little Glass Slipper (Scribner's 1954) puts up with everything. When her work is done, she creeps to the chimney corner and sits there in the ashes. She thinks, "A ball is not for such as I." She expects snubs from her stepsisters. In Chanticleer and The Fox (Crowell, 1958), the dairy woman and her two daughters chase the fox unsuccessfully until they think "their hearts would burst." Madeline fails to find Genevieve (Madeline's Rescue, Viking, 1953). In Mei Li (Doubleday, 1938) young Mei Li asks, "What can I be good for?" Her brother scoffs at her saying, "What can a girl do at the fair?" Mei Li is too frightened to shoot off firecrackers. She is unsure of hitting the Good Luck Bell with her penny and asks her brother to throw the penny for her. Other unfortunate girls move through many other Caldecott winners as well.

THE FEMALE IMAGE AS THE NURTURER. The female image was seen as the nurturer of the family in many of these books. She took care of sick members of the family, soothed and cared for scratches and hurt feelings. She comforted and helped others with difficulties. She contributed to the feeding, rearing, fostering, educating, the bringing up and the training of other family members. First, there is Old Joney, the servant in Duffy and The Devil (Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1973) who does her

best to help Duffy learn the Devil's name. In The Fool of the World and The Flying Ship (Farrar, 1968), the unnamed mother packs hampers of food with soft white rolls, cooked meats and bottles of corn brandy for her sons as they prepared to leave home. Unprosperous Baboushka asks the three Kings to rest in her hut in Baboushka and the Three Kings (Parrassus, 1960). Ceci's mother and Maria plan Ceci's first Posada in Nine Days to Christmas (Viking 1959). In Chanticleer and the Fox (Crowell, 1958), the poor but managing dairy woman takes care of herself and her two daughters. She is quick to rush outside when she hears the woeful cry of the Chanticleer. There is an unnamed mother who reads a story to her children and whose words are lost in the noise of the hurricane wind in Time of Wonder, (Viking, 1957). The fairy godmother in The Little Glass Slipper (Scribner's, 1954) comforted Cinderella and helped her attend the ball. Solicitous Miss Clavel in Madeline's Rescue (Viking, 1953) took the girls for walks, told the girls to sleep well, turned out the lights at bedtime and rushed to the girls' room when she feared a disaster. In The Egg Tree, (Scribner's, 1950). There is a helpful policeman's wife searching for a cough mixture, making a chest plaster and knitting a yarn scarf by her husband's bedside in White Snow, Bright Snow (Lothrop, Lee and Shepherd, 1947). A jingle in The Rooster Crows (MacMillan, 1945) cites, "Granny, Granny, I am ill, send for the doctor to give me a pill."

A myriad of other female characters are seen in the nurturing role in other winners.

THE FEMALE IMAGE AS THE CARETAKER. There were female characters in these books who cleaned the house, who did the laundry and the sewing, who shopped for food, who prepared the food, and grew the food. The girls work in the garden in Time of Wonder (Viking, 1957). The female character

prepares for cooking as does the old woman in One Fine Day (MacMillan, 1971) who gathers wood for her fire. Ceci's mother goes to the market in Nine Days to Christmas (Viking, 1959). Mrs. Wing in Mei Li (Doubleday, 1938) bakes and fries and chops. Abe's mother bakes gingerbreadmen in Abraham Lincoln (Doubleday, 1939). An unnamed mother in They Were Strong and Good (Viking, 1940) cares for bees and takes honey from the hives. In The Rooster Crows (MacMillan, 1945) Mother milks a cow. Grandmom in The Egg Tree (Scribner's, 1950) dyes eggs and cooks an enormous cookie rabbit. Miss Clavel prepared camomile tea for Madeline in Madeline's Rescue (Viking, 1953). The Funny Little Woman liked to make dumplings out of rice. She pats and shapes the rice flour. She cooks for the wicked oni and claims she will have fun for weeks and months cooking rice. (Funny Little Woman, Dutton, 1972).

The female characters in these books often clean the house. The policeman's wife sweeps. Mei Li sweeps. Maria sweeps. Baboushka sweeps, scrubs, and feeds wood into the stove and prepares lonely meals for herself. Sam, though allowed to dream in Sam, Bangs and Moonshine, (Holt, 1967) washes the dishes, makes the beds and sweeps the floors. The female characters pack and unpack. Abraham Lincoln's mother packs pots and pans and household goods, while the unnamed mother in Time of Wonder (Viking, 1957) packs boxes in the car. Female characters sew, prepare the laundry and provide clothes for the family. Abraham's mother spins and sews and makes him a pair of breeches. Old Joney in Duffy and The Devil (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1973) is too old to do her fine chores of spinning, sewing and knitting and so receives the aid of Duffy, who claims to spin like a saint and knit like an angel. One looks closely to find Mother carrying what appears to be a clothes basket in The Biggest Bear

(Houghton Mifflin, 1952). The female characters assist with the dressing and undressing of family members. Cinderella aids her stepsisters as they prepare for the ball. Peter's mom takes off his wet socks in The Snowy Day (Viking, 1962) without saying one word in the text. Duffy pulls off the squire's boots as he sits back in an armchair in front of the fireplace. (Duffy and The Devil, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1973).

A host of other female characters labor and perform caretaking tasks in these winners.

The Female Image In The Home Environment. The female image in this study was seen most often in the home environment in the books. These were the characters who were in their dwelling place or in a social unit formed by a family living together. The female characters were seen in the bath tub, in the dressing room, in bed, in the living room, in the kitchen, on a patio, in the yard, at the water pump and in the garden. They lived on farms, in small towns and villages, in a house on the heather, a house by the seashore and in castles.

Often, they were the nurturers and the caretakers. When not performing these service functions, the female characters sometimes became "reminder" females. As "reminder" females, they appear inactive. They stand in doorways (The Biggest Bear, Houghton Mifflin, 1952). They look through windows. (The Fool of The World and The Flying Ship, Farrar, 1968; Sam, Bangs and Moonshine, Houghton Mifflin, 1952; Prayer For a Child, MacMillan, 1944). They sit in the background and watch. (May I Bring A Friend, Atheneum, 1964). Sometimes they are allowed to speak in the text yet are not seen anywhere in the illustrations. (Where The Wild Things Are, Harper and Row, 1963). Sometimes they are seen in the illustrations yet are not allowed to speak in the text. The Snowy Day, Viking, 1962).

Other seemingly unimportant female characters exist in these medal award books in too great a number.

Considering all the incidents of being subordinate to the other sex, the female characters in these books were judged to be subordinate to the male characters 82.00 per cent of the time. The female characters were seen mainly in the home environment (58.00 per cent of the time) performing nurturing behavior (83.00 per cent of the time), and laboring with caretaker tasks (69.00 per cent of the time). The female characters were seen as the one who fails over 50.00 per cent of the time in which failure situations occurred. There was only one character who could be judged as a significant working woman—Miss Clavel in Madeline's Rescue (Viking, 1953).

It appears that the sex role models for the female image in these most distinguished picture story books are narrowly defined. There is concern by scholars and professional groups about the damage that may be done by narrowly defined role models. If narrowly defined, then the female sex-role models in these picture story-book illustrations and in the words may be limiting to the young female who interacts with them. These vicarious experiences in the "very best" books may be, in fact, restrictive. These possible instructive vehicles may likely present confining experiences to the young girl. It appears that some of life's experiences are taboo for female sex role modeling. They are never viewed or read about in the Caldecott Medal books.

Some readers of the Caldecott Medal books may suggest that these winners present sex-role behaviors for the female characters which are reflective of the majority of activities of the females in our society and, thus, may preceive the female image in these picture-story

books as "sweet and nice". However, other readers may suggest that these award-winning books may, indeed, limit the sex-role behaviors of the female characters and thus present an incomplete or colorless portrayal of the female image. Still other readers may indicate, that even if one considers these behaviors as a "norm", there is little "spice" in the narrowly defined sex-role behaviors of these female characters. Indeed, there may be little zest and piquancy for a reader when he/she looks at the female image in these books and sees the limited and fixed pattern of behaviors.

Whatever the reader's point of view, if one assumes that the Caldecott Medal Award Winners are not stereotyping the female image, this assumption can be challenged.